

5.11 Transportation Hazard

A major transportation hazard event has been determined to have a **Medium** likelihood of occurrence in Benton County within the five-year planning cycle of this Plan. Therefore, although some hazard characterization information is presented below, no further risk assessment has been performed for this hazard. Additional analyses to further characterize the risks of this hazard and the development of suitable mitigation action items will be conducted in the future based on periodic reviews of this hazard mitigation plan and available resources

5.11.1 Nature of the Hazard

A transportation hazard may be defined as a condition created by moving anything by common carrier. Transportation hazards may be divided into two categories: (1) hazards created by the material that is being transported; and (2) hazards created by the transportation medium. Transportation systems available in Benton County include air, rail, water, and road. All of these systems and supporting transportation resources provide services on a national, regional, and local basis. A major accident is possible in any of these modes of transportation.

Historical Events

To be determined.

Characteristics of the Hazard

Air

Benton County is vulnerable to two types of major air transportation accidents. One is a crash involving a large passenger aircraft. The other is an airplane crash causing casualties on the ground. In general, airplane crashes are most likely to occur within five miles of an airport, typically along flight paths. The areas within a five-mile radius of Benton County's airports (and the Tri-Cities Airport in Pasco) are susceptible to a mass casualty event if a plane crashed in these areas, even if the plane was not a passenger aircraft.

Railways

Two national freight rail carriers, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe and the Union Pacific, provide service within Benton County. Both rail carriers operate intermodal freight terminals in the Tri-Cities area. In addition, the northwest regional hub for the BNSF is in Pasco. The greatest risk associated with freight trains is a spill of hazardous materials. However, at-grade crossings also pose a risk to human health and safety.

Water

Benton County's location on the Columbia River provides direct access to the Columbia-Snake River System – one of the most modern intermodal transportation networks in the country. This commercial waterway extends from the Pacific Ocean over 465 miles into eastern Washington and Idaho, and includes eight dam and lock complexes. This transportation system is accessed through the Port of Benton, the Port of Kennewick, and the Port of Pasco. The Columbia-Snake River System is heavily used for freight (barge) traffic and recreational boating.

Benton County is vulnerable to shipping and boating accidents. Major emergencies associated with freight vessels are more likely to result from spills or collisions with passenger vessels or bridge piers. The U.S. Coast Guard has the primary responsibility for safety and rescue on the river.

Highways

Privately owned vehicles provide the primary means of transportation of individuals in the County. Freeways, highways and local roads serve the area.

Potential Causes

A large majority of transportation accidents are due to inclement weather. Driver/pilot/operator impairment (alcohol and drugs) is a major cause also. The top weather hazards to transportation are:

- Winter precipitation
- Fog and low visibility
- Heavy rain
- Strong Winds

Effects

The two major effects of transportation accidents are injury/death and hazardous materials releases. Mass casualty incidents can be difficult because of location. Remote locations can slow response time and delay treatment of the injured. Heavily populated locations can have crowd control problems and slow response time due to congestion.

The worst type of incident would involve mass casualties and a hazardous materials release, including radioactive material. The presence of hazardous materials and the necessity of protecting emergency personnel would slow any response to the injured.

Response

Response to transportation accidents is typically the same, with variations for the source and location of the incident. Response is focused on determining the presence or absence of hazardous materials and then assisting the injured.

5.11.2 Hazard Assessment

Hazard Identification

To be determined.

Vulnerability Assessment

To be determined.

Risk Analysis

To be determined.

5.11.3 Community Concerns

To be determined.

Current Conditions

To be determined.

Ongoing Mitigation

The United States Department of Transportation has placed regulations, which cover practical means for securing safety in transit, upon those materials considered to be extremely hazardous. (For further information, see Chapter 5.7 Hazardous Materials Hazards).

5.11.4 Mitigation Strategies

To be determined.

5.11.5 Resources

State Resources

To be determined.

Federal Resources

To be determined.

Other Resources

To be determined.